Jeffrey Epstein's Pal Jean-Luc Brunel Quietly Sells Off His Infamous Modeling Biz MC2

Kate Briquelet

Modeling mogul Jean-Luc Brunel is quietly selling off his MC2 agency in Miami, The Daily Beast has learned—while authorities in France search for him as part of their investigation into his friend, the millionaire sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

The 74-year-old talent scout has long been accused of supplying underage girls to Epstein and of drugging and raping models himself. Brunel denied both of these charges.

Brunel reportedly vanished after Epstein's jailhouse suicide, and French prosecutors want to speak to him about Epstein's abuse of minors abroad. Last week, cops searched his Parisian home and the offices of Karin Models, the agency Brunel led before launching MC2 Model Management. Brunel created the agency MC2 in 2005, reportedly with $1 million from Epstein, who regularly housed Brunel and MC2 models at his Manhattan apartments, according to the testimony of a former MC2 bookkeeper.

But while Brunel has dodged the press in recent years, he's allegedly already sold MC2's assets in New York and is currently in a deal to sell MC2 in Miami. The French agent also helped to create at least two new boutique modeling firms: The Identity Models in New York and 1 Mother Agency in Kyiv, Ukraine, former employees say.

The New York office of MC2, according to one MC2 lawyer, sold its assets to a new firm called The Identity Models in 2017.

And MC2's Miami location is allegedly in the process of transferring its assets to The Source Models, an agency run by MC2 executives Jeff Fuller and Petra Pedraza. A representative for The Source said MC2's location in Miami will shut down.

Staff at MC2's third location in Tel Aviv did not respond to messages seeking comment.

Brunel has claimed MC2 lost business over his ties to Epstein. In 2015, he filed a lawsuit in Florida state court against the financier, claiming, "MC2 was worth millions of dollars; now, due to the illegal actions of Epstein, MC2 is almost worthless."

The fashion industry veteran also denied any connection to Epstein's sexual pyramid scheme—which involved enlisting underage girls for "massages" in his Palm Beach and New York mansions. Epstein would molest the girls or even rape them, and had some of his victims recruit even more minors for him to abuse.

But Virginia Roberts Giuffre, who claims Epstein kept her as his "sex slave," identified Brunel as a purveyor of minor girls. In a 2015 affidavit, Giuffre said Epstein groomed her for sex with his powerful friends including Brunel and Prince Andrew (who also denies the allegations).

"Brunel would offer the girls 'modeling' jobs. A lot of the girls came from poor countries or poor backgrounds, and he lured them in with a promise of making good money," Giuffre stated, adding that Brunel joined Epstein and gal pal Ghislaine Maxwell for orgies with children in locations including the U.S. Virgin Islands, New Mexico and Palm Beach.

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Sigrid McCawley, a partner at Boies Schiller Flexner who represents Giuffre and other Epstein accusers, told The Daily Beast that Brunel should be on authorities' radar as a key participant in Epstein's child sex-trafficking ring.

"We have to carefully look at the people who are around him and who are providing him with these females, and Jean-Luc Brunel was doing exactly that," McCawley said. "He was using the ruse of a modeling agency to bring Epstein young victims."

Soon after Giuffre's claims made news, Brunel issued his only public comment on the matter: "I strongly deny having participated, neither directly nor indirectly, in the actions Mr. Jeffrey Epstein is being accused of. I strongly deny having committed any illicit act or any wrongdoing in the course of my work as a scouter or model agencies manager."

Still, Brunel's bad publicity over Epstein may have led him to shutter the MC2 offices. At the same time, sources say, he helped in the creation of two other modeling agencies—though his name does not appear on publicly available corporation records for either.

Multiple former MC2 employees and models told The Daily Beast that Brunel was considered, at least at the beginning, as the man who helped create The Identity.

According to its website, the agency "was founded in 2017 with the concept of a creative boutique to work on and develop different profiles while creating individual identities for those represented."

The Identity is run by Mathias Pardo, a French-born talent scout who is listed as "vice president" of the company in New York state corporation records. (The identities of the president or any other executives of the Delaware-incorporated firm aren't publicly known.)

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Pardo, who for years worked with Brunel as an MC2 agent, told The Daily Beast that he owns and founded The Identity in 2018. He denied Brunel played a role in founding the modeling firm. "Mr. Brunel has absolutely nothing to do with The Identity," Pardo said in an email on Sept. 13. He did not return further messages.

Yet in 2017, one Identity model allegedly joined Pardo at New York's Mercer Kitchen for a meet-and-greet that included only one other person: Jean-Luc Brunel. According to the model's mother, Lea Assenmacher, the young woman showed both men her portfolio during the rendezvous at the chic Soho restaurant.

The model told her mother that Brunel was "very polite" and "drank a lot of champagne," as they made small-talk about the fashion world. During their conversation, Assenmacher claimed, Brunel and Pardo indicated that MC2 would cease operations and The Identity would take its place. The girl signed a contract with The Identity soon after.

"She felt Jean-Luc Brunel was the final arbiter" of whether she was signed, Assenmacher told The Daily Beast. "Mathias was deferential to him."

Two former MC2 employees told The Daily Beast that initially, The Identity operated out of MC2's offices on West 14th Street. "The only ones working for The Identity was Mathias and Jean-Luc Brunel," one ex-staffer said, and referring to Brunel, added that it seemed like, "They just wanted to open another place without his name."

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Serena, a second former employee who asked to withhold her last name, said, "I was around for a lot of the logistical conversations about the conversion into The Identity. It must've turned over a month or two after I left, if even. But the goal of The Identity was the 'younger' faces would represent it while MC2 stayed the same, but I don't know if that happened."

The Identity shares the same attorney as MC2—Ian Illych Martinez of Florida—and houses its models at the same East Village apartment once used by MC2.

Martinez also represents The Source Models and 1 Mother Agency, which Brunel allegedly founded in Kyiv, Ukraine, in 2014, former employees and models say.

The Identity and MC2 share models and at least one other talent agent in common: former MC2 hand Vinicius Freire.

And a review of The Identity's website shows that 20 of its 67 models are also currently signed with MC2 in Tel Aviv or Miami. At least 12 Identity models are also signed with 1 Mother Agency. (Some models have contracts with all three agencies.)

In an email, Martinez said Brunel is not an owner of The Identity. "The Identity

Models, Inc., entered into an Asset Purchase Agreement with MC2 Model Management, LLC. in 2017," Martinez wrote. "The Identity Model, Inc.'s sole shareholder and one of two officers, is someone other than Mr. Brunel."

"According to the October 16, 2017, Minutes of Organizational Meeting, two individuals—neither of whom were Mr. Brunel—were elected officers," the attorney continued. "Any ownership allegations regarding Mr. Brunel or any other entity with his involvement is expressly denied and refuted by the corporate documents.

"Other than the aforementioned, there is no further comment regarding this matter."

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Martinez did not answer followup questions on Brunel's involvement with The Identity, The Source Models and 1 Mother.

Meanwhile, Marcia Gomez, a spokeswoman for The Source Models, said the agency is owned by Pedraza and Fuller, who was Brunel's longtime business partner at MC2. Indeed, the contact email listed on The Source's Instagram page is an Mc2models.com address.

"Mr. Brunel is not involved and has no connection whatsoever to this organization," Gomez said in an email. "Additionally, MC2 Miami will be ceasing operations."

Gomez said MC2 Miami's assets will be sold to The Source Models. (Fuller and Pedraza did not return messages seeking comment.)

Asked why Fuller's wife, Hilary Altman, is the registered agent for the Ukrainian agency 1 Mother in Florida corporation filings, Gomez said, "Recently, as an inducement for 1st right of refusal in the Miami modeling market, Jeff's wife agreed to be the manager for the domestic company and be a liaison for this business."

"Mr. Brunel's involvement with 1 Mother was limited to providing a loan at its inception," Gomez added. "Once the loan was satisfied (several years ago), that completed his involvement with 1 Mother."

Reached by The Daily Beast, one model signed with 1 Mother said she believed Brunel was the owner of the agency and that she saw him at the Kyiv office last spring.

Another model who left 1 Mother told The Daily Beast that Brunel was the owner and that "he came a few times to Ukraine to visit all models."

But Katya Talanova, CEO of the 1 Mother Agency, told The Daily Beast that she owns the firm—not Brunel. "We had been working with MC2 Miami for some time," Talanova said in an email. "They had a first right of refusal because of loan that we had (that was covered long time ago)."

Asked about Brunel, Talanova said, "Mr. Brunel has nothing to do with 1 Mother Agency. He is out of business and doesn't have any connections with us."

She declined to answer follow-up questions on the loan she referenced.

Vladimir Yudashkin, who says he co-founded 1 Mother with Brunel in 2014, said the agency was the Frenchman's brainchild. "Jean-Luc approached me and we started to work together," Yudashkin told The Daily Beast.

"He wanted models who worked for 1 Mother to think that they are booked to MC2 to represent them in New York because MC2 is the best choice for them—not because MC2 is financially related to 1 Mother and 1 Mother has no other choice to work with MC2," Yudashkin said.

"When the time came to place the models in the U.S., Jean-Luc pushed to work exclusively with MC2," Yudashkin added, "and potentially with The Identity in the future."

Brunel, according to Yudashkin, wanted to open a new agency in America.

"He had told me that he's not happy how MC2 is doing and saw that the image was a problem and he wanted to open a new agency," Yudashkin said. "He wanted to name it The Identity and Mathias was supposed to be the person who runs it."

Yudashkin said MC2 was supposed to be the agency for more commercial modeling jobs, while The Identity's goal was to become a high fashion agency.

In 2017, Yudashkin left 1 Mother Agency because he felt "it was impossible to work with" Brunel.

"I was in the position to lie to models about MC2 and it was intolerable for me," he said.

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— Vladimir Yudashkin, formerly of 1 Mother

In February, Ukranian model Natalia Kulakovskaya filed a lawsuit against 1 Mother and MC2, alleging that "Mother breached its fiduciary duty" by "forcing" her to work with MC2. The complaint, filed in Miami-Dade County, alleges "Mother and MC2 share common control and/or ownership" and that "it was self-serving and profitable for Mother to work with Mother's affiliate."

Martinez filed a motion to bring the case to arbitration. Kulakovskaya's lawyer, Nicolas Cuetara, said he will not comment on pending litigation.

The Ukrainian agency sued another model, Daria Khlystun, in November 2017, claiming that she breached her contract by failing to pay 1 Mother commission from her earnings with other agencies.

In her answer and counterclaim to 1 Mother's complaint, Khlystun denied violating her contract and instead claimed it wasn't valid because of "duress/undue influence" and "fraud and/or misrepresentation" by the agency, among other alleged transgressions.

Khlystun claims she suffered damages because 1 Mother Agency failed to provide financial support, visas for travel, and housing—and didn't allow her "to select the agency, or model manager, of her choosing."

She alleged 1 Mother "abused its influence to force" her to work with agencies that weren't in her "best interest," according to one November 2018 court filing.

One of those agencies was MC2, which she claims is "affiliated" with 1 Mother.

Khlystun's lawyer, Cuetara, filed a notice of service of a proposed settlement in February.

Martinez did not return messages seeking comment on the 1 Mother lawsuits.